



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,  
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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A cup of hot coffee with milk and a biscuit, or a basin of oatmeal porridge with milk, should be allowed before the morning preparation, the work of which will then be done far more satisfactorily. A light tea at five or six o'clock, with a good nutritious supper of porridge, farinaceous pudding, or some good soup with bread, at eight, is preferable to a heavier tea at six and a long fast till breakfast on the following morning.

This then, ladies and gentlemen, concludes my subject. I am fully conscious of the inadequate way in which I have dealt with it; but if I have been able to urge its importance upon you; if I have been able to teach any of you some important fact which you did not know, or which you had not duly considered; if the result of this lecture should be a gain in health, strength and happiness to any one infant or child, then your time has not been wholly wasted, and mine is well repaid.

## WHAT TO DO WITH OUR GIRLS.

BY MISS SOULSBY.

"ARE you going to send your mother to hear Miss Soulsby's paper?" said a friend of mine to a girl. "No! indeed! Mamma would never forgive anyone who offered to tell her how to manage *us*!"

This objection to advice seems such a fundamental feeling in all mothers, that I doubt if even those belonging to the Parents' Union do not sympathize with it in their hearts. *I* heartily sympathize with that mother! There is such a fundamental difference between the mother's knowledge from the *inside* and the stranger's observation from *outside*, that I do not wonder the mother feels as if unmarried advice were the most profitless form of coals to Newcastle.

There is one point of the mother's knowledge peculiar to herself,—her knowledge of probable hereditary tendencies,—which at once puts on a lower level of practical wisdom any suggestions from an outsider, however wise in the abstract. But the mother's consciousness of her own superior power of dealing with the child in question, sometimes leads her to undervalue the stranger's counter-balancing advantage of being a "*looker-on*." Every mother, without exception, simply *by force of being the mother*, can tell us outsiders far more about her own child than we can possibly tell her; but every mother has probably known what it is to receive suggestions from impartial relations and friends,—criticisms somewhat hotly repelled at the time, but which seemed to her to hit the mark when considered afterwards in calmer moments. If you multiply by hundreds that clear-sighted aunt's or cousin's experience of children, you arrive at the schoolmistress's point of view!

Then also each child is not only the unit, intimately known only to its own mother: it is also one of a generation, liable



to be influenced by the current streams of thought and by the prevailing fashion of education,—forces which cannot be so well estimated by individual mothers, as by those who spend their lives tracing the effect of these tendencies on a large number of children. Pray realize that I defer to the knowledge of every mother present in the matter of children, and then let us consider together "*What to do with our Girls.*"

Can we talk of our girls "as a class?"

Yes! I see High School girls, University students, stay-at-home girls (these last often suffering more or less from discontent), and, though no two are alike, the raw material "*girl*" seems always to need a certain fundamental, uniform treatment, though its application varies. The fact is, they are young, and all young things need protection,—need pruning, and need exercising. The more I see of girls who need to earn their living, the more I see that, exactly the same qualities are needed in private as in professional life. The same power is wanted in the wife, the teacher, the daughter, the parish worker.

Girls have no idea how valuable a training for the money market is to be found in keeping the fifth Commandment! Being unable to get on at home, necessarily involves very great difficulty in getting on abroad!—it shows a restlessness, a want of humility, a self-seeking, which make a girl useless for any work that involves dealing with character, *i.e.*, which is at all interesting. Of course she may make a good accountant, and may serve tables all the more energetically for her undisciplined self-will, but she is incapable of any deeper work until she has learnt to rule herself. Whereas, if she is humble and dutiful, she *is* fit to deal with others.

In these days of cheap books and many lectures, the aids to intellectual growth are within the reach of all, and there is no occasion for any mother to overlook moral defects in a governess because of cleverness. A mother sometimes feels that she has not herself had the intellectual advantages of the present day, and she wishes her daughter to be on a level with other girls; and, with this object, she gets a highly recommended foreign governess, or a clever, brilliant young woman,—fresh from the best modern advantages, but without any discipline of character,—in the hopes that she will impart modern culture and will *not* impart her moral atmosphere.

The mother thinks that, though there is no definite good moral or religious influence about such a teacher, still there is *no harm* about her, and that Maud or Evelyn shall not hereafter blame their mother for depriving them of modern advantages! I think, in such a case, Maud or Evelyn might well blame the mother for giving them modern *disadvantages*.

For what stands in the way of modern girls and unfits them for real usefulness, in spite of all the mental advantages they enjoy, is the *lack of training in character*,—the lack of steady self-control and self-examination. I mean such examination as you find very profitably suggested in Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography; I mean the self-control inculcated by Hannah More and by the Edgeworths: I mean the solid discipline which prevailed before the word "Puritan" was put out of court, as it is now,—before it was supposed that a duty being dull, was any reason for not doing it.

If there is any mother here who laments that she cannot give her daughter advantages, or that the schoolroom is dull, do not let her think that the girl need therefore suffer in the least as a competitor in Life's Race. What *will* handicap her in that race is, if her mother allows her to be flippant and irreverent in speech, and self-indulgent in act: if she is allowed to forget messages and to escape the consequences of her own unbusiness-like ways: if she is allowed to put pleasure before duty: to say, "Poor child! let her have a good time while she can!" really means, "Poor child! *while she has a mother's love to sweeten every duty*, let her be so trained as to have a very *bad* time when that mother's love is a thing of the past, and she has to face the world alone!"

How are we to arrive at this trained and balanced character, which we all feel to be so needful, and know to be so rare? Let your home education aim at training character first and foremost. Your own vanity may suffer if *your* daughter is not so forward as your sister-in-law's; but console yourself with the thought that your well *trained* child will almost certainly do better than the well *taught* child, when the Battle of Life begins.

Now suppose that you have trained your child till she is seventeen or eighteen. I should like her then to go a good deal into society with you, and to form her friendships and her



manners under your eye. I hope she would then marry; but if she did not, I should like her, *after* having had a full dose of society and of your social training, to go to College, and then to take to some real work in life,—always supposing you did not need her at home. If she has not the ballast of matrimony by the time she is thirty, she will probably be the better for some ballast of work. Much of the work of to-day is good and enthusiastic, but not lasting, because the workers are undisciplined in character and too young in years; but your daughter ought, after such training as we have supposed, to be fit to do good and lasting work.

The special branch of work for girls, in which I am at present interested, is National School Teaching. You may think "that would never do for my daughter;" but I am going to speak of it because much of the training which is needed for it, is also the training needed for every active life, and also (though your own daughter may not take to it), yet, you must often be asked to advise other girls, such as country clergymen's daughters, who need to earn their living. I should like everyone to know what a thoroughly good money opening is now being offered in this profession. £25 covers the cost of the necessary training, and there is absolute certainty of employment, beginning at about £70 and possibly going up to £250. No special cleverness is required, and it can be begun at any age under forty.

The training for this work opens the door to an increasingly varied range of employments, but I will not give you business details as to the training and the posts to which it leads.\* I would rather dwell on the splendid national and religious work which a lady might do in this sphere. Many are anxious as to the future of religious education in England. What a power for good every such teacher would be who went into the work from a religious motive! I honour the Settlement work done in London and other towns, but I feel, myself, as if the prosaic work of being a paid and qualified National Teacher would do still more for the poor. What I should like to see would be all the little country schools worked by ladies. There is an ideal picture of such a school

\* Such details are given in a pamphlet to be obtained from Miss Soulsby, Oxford High School. Price 2d.

in Miss O'Neill's "Devonshire Idylls," published by Stott. That one story is worth twenty times the 2/- which the book costs!

I am told that country schools are unbearable, because of the pride of the Squire and the tyranny of the Vicar: that the schoolmistress runs the risk of being told to go to the back door if she calls at the great house. I cannot help thinking that a sense of humour might surmount even that, to say nothing of the sense of religion which would support a Sister of Charity under it! Besides, it is hardly fair to defame the whole body of squires and vicars, in a way which modern philanthropists would highly resent if it were applied to poachers!

But I am not wishing to represent National School teaching as a rose-water life: no life is, that is worth living. I am supposing a girl with power and common sense, and a strong wish to leave the world better than she finds it,—and this describes many and many a girl at this moment. She is eager to work, and asks where to begin.

I say to her, if you want to do as much good and *as little harm* as possible, consider this opening in life. Here you will be under the guidance of a clergyman, at an age when you require all the guidance you can get. You can throw yourself into the children out of school, and make them know their own village, its birds, its flowers, its history, its architecture. Make them first proud of their village and then of their country. Make some corner of that country dear to them,—dear in a deeper and wider sense than just because they happened to live there.

Afternoons so spent would bear more lasting fruit of happiness for you than the lawn-tennis at the Squire's, which you ought to deny yourself, for the same reason that S. Paul would have refused meat. No work for the Primrose League or Liberal Women's Federation will equal the political good you might do, by turning out our future rulers, neither Liberals nor Conservatives, but patriotic, fair-minded men. No efforts to reform the settled bad habits of the submerged tenth will do a tithe of the good which you may do by biassing country boys in the right direction before they drift into the vortex of London. I know one Squire's daughter who is training herself with a view to this work, because she



thinks two or three years so spent, will enable her to be useful in the various schools on the property, even if she does not give her whole life to the work, and that she will be able, at all events, more effectually to help pupil teachers.

Many a girl satisfies her craving for definite work by two or three years at Dresden or the College of Music; after which, her painting or violin only form one of the many strands of her life. She would gain more useful knowledge and forge better armour for the battle of life by spending the same time in National School Training. You may dislike the idea of her mixing with lower class girls at the training college; but when I consider the curious mixture which girls seek for, and mothers allow, when it is a question of artist life abroad, or "slumming" at home, I must say that intercourse with good respectable young women of the pupil-teacher class, for a limited time, ought not to stand in the way of any girl who believes that a National School is an opening for a national and religious work.

It is a magnificent work, and possible to everyone who has her five wits—and a disciplined character. The element of failure in this work will be *moral*: the rocks on which many will make shipwreck are the faults which their mother should have eradicated before the child was ten years old, and which she might even now greatly diminish by steady effort.

The chief faults which I am afraid of are self-conceit and a misapplied sense of justice. These are very common in youth, and it would materially smooth home life, as well as professional life, if they could be weeded out! I am very much afraid that nine girls out of ten will not have had sufficient character-training from their mothers, to make them take scolding and advice *as if they liked it*. Every sensible person is grateful for it; but then young people are not, as a rule, sensible, unless their mother before them has been sensible.

Again, nine girls out of ten are accustomed to give their opinion as if it was quite as good, if not better than an elder's. Knowledge doubtless comes to our girl graduates, but wisdom lingers,—especially the wisdom which teaches that forty years of life must make a person *more experienced* than twenty years, however full of book-learning those twenty years may be? It would be a great step towards success in

business and happiness at home, if every girl would learn, as a matter of personal sanctification, to get the habit of thinking that probably her elder is right and she is wrong, and that even if she be right, it is a wholesome practice not to justify herself. Here comes in the misapplied sense of justice, which stunts so many natures. Have as keen a sense as you will for other people,—be as sensitive and thin-skinned and perceptive as you can, *for others*,—but when you are tempted to use those qualities on your own behalf, treat them as amongst the worst snares of the Devil, and as among the greatest of all hindrances to any good work, at home or abroad.

In my mind's eye, I see an ardent enthusiastic girl taking up a National School as if she were a Crusader. I see her indignant at the strictures of the vicar's wife on some child whom she, the new comer, alone understands! I see her ardent to *reform* the school, when the utmost limits of her rights would be to *inform* it, with the right spirit: a much harder task and much less interesting, because it can only be done by the common place method of conquering her own faults and saying her own prayers. She is too apt to feel herself a princess, voluntarily condescending, and forgets that she is merely an inexperienced (and therefore probably inefficient) teacher, who is paid to give satisfaction to her employers, not to carry out her own ideas.

I come round again to what I started with,—to the fact that the woman at home and the teacher need the same qualities. Whether your girls are educated at home or at school,—whether you look forward to a private or a professional life for them,—I am sure you will agree with me, that the quality most needed for success and happiness in either life, is that one which it needs all a mother's training and all a mother's prayers to ensure—True Humility.